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STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, AF/PDPA, DRL, INR/AA
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/26
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTERIAL DELEGATION TRAVELS TO SAUDI ARABIA TO SEE
YAR'ADUA

REF: ABUJA 0189 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: James P. McNulty, Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy
Abuja, Political Section; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Secretary to the Government of the Federation Mahmud Yayale Ahmed called the Ambassador shortly before 1 a.m., February 23, to inform her of his impending departure for Saudi Arabia along with five other Cabinet colleagues. As reported in reftel, the Federal Executive Council had decided February 17 to dispatch a delegation to Saudi Arabia to express appreciation to Saudi King Abdul Aziz and visit with hospitalized President Yar'Adua and his family. This decision came as a compromise to a separate proposal to declare Yar'Adua as permanently incapacitated.

¶2. (SBU) Separately, Foreign Minister Chief Ojo Maduekwe explained to the press that the Delegation had delayed departure from Abuja, planned earlier for February 21 or 22, because of the need to complete "protocol" arrangements with the Saudi Government. He emphasized the delegation's mandate to thank the Saudi King for his hospitality in hosting Yar'Adua's treatment and denied that delegation constituted a "medical panel," despite inclusion of a medical doctor, Health Minister Babatunde Osotimehin.

¶3. (SBU) Separately, Nigerian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Abdullah Aminchi insisted to the press February 22 that doctors at the hospital in Jeddah -- not Saudi authorities -- had blocked access by visitors to President Yar'Adua for medical reasons. He also claimed to have seen Yar'Adua February 20 in his hospital room, insisting that "he's really feeling better now." Meanwhile, a February 23 press report attributed to the Saudi Government claimed that it had not blocked any movements by Nigeria's President. (COMMENT: Aminchi, who previously served as Deputy Governor under Yar'Adua in Katsina State, had famously claimed weeks earlier that Yar'Adua was sitting up in bed watching football matches on Saudi television. END COMMENT.) In Abuja, the National Assembly threatened to summon the Saudi Ambassador to Nigeria to explain why Saudi authorities had allegedly refused to allow a delegation from the House of Representatives to see Yar'Adua during a recent visit to Saudi Arabia, according to the press.

¶4. (C) Former Head of State Muhammadu Buhari told DCM and PolCouns February 22 that former President Obasanjo had appointed Yar'Adua as the ruling party's presidential candidate even though he knew

Yar'Adua had a "terminal" condition. He predicted that, if the delegation failed to see Yar'Adua, the National Assembly would impeach the President. That same day, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar separately told DCM and PolCouns that the delegation's failure to see Yar'Adua would only mean that he remained "inaccessible" and would prevent the delegation from judging the President's medical condition. He claimed that First Lady Turai Yar'Adua had invited him via text message two days earlier to visit her and the President in Jeddah. Averring that he had not yet decided on his response to the invitation, Atiku explained that he had developed a close family and political relationship with the President ("like an older brother") during the past 22 years after the death of Yar'Adua's older sibling Shehu.

COMMENT

15. (C) Whether the official Ministerial delegation actually sees President Yar'Adua remains unclear, even as of February 23. Failure to see the ailing President, however, would increase pressure upon the Federal Executive Council to initiate procedures to declare the absent President as "permanently incapacitated."
END COMMENT.
SANDERS